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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6823
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4544
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3179
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7688
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1768
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5100
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1307
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INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7431

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Asad/Referendum, Syria/UNDOF, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian
Territories, Human Rights Report (5/24)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on May 24 reported VP Shara's lecture at Damascus University on May 23 in anticipation of the May 27 referendum on a new term for President Asad. Vice President Shara renewed Syria's rejection of the war in Iraq, stressing support for the political process in the country based on genuine national reconciliation and a timetable for withdrawal of foreign troops. He said that the appearance of extremist groups in Lebanon is the outcome of the "weakness of the state" and that the only solution is "a political solution to the current political crisis." He wondered how trials can be conducted for crimes committed in Iraq while the UNSC is used to set up a tribunal for a single crime. He accused Lebanese factions of "seeking foreign security, which becomes Syria's problem, because the situation in Lebanon reflects on the neighborhood." On the possibility of a war in the Gulf between Iran and the US, he said, "the US does not want to protect the Gulf countries; it wants to protect its own interests, and the proof is that it is about to engage Tehran in negotiations as it did with Syria." He stressed that the "military presence in the region is not for the sake of Arab security, but for American oil interests."

The Minister of Defense, General Hassan Turkmani, discussed on May 23 with the Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), General Wolfgang Jilke, the latest developments in the region. The two also conferred about UNDOF and cooperation between Syria and the United Nations.

End of summary.

¶3. Selected Headlines:

"Vice President Farouk Shara meets faculty and students of Damascus University. Shara: People in Syria have now become more satisfied and confident about the future under President Asad's leadership. Washington misleads and blocks the peace process and hinders UN Security Council" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/24)

"Defense Minister Turkmani discusses regional developments and UNDOF cooperation with Syria, with Wolfgang Jilke, Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/24)

"A third explosion in A'leh. Washington rushes to support the

governing team. The Lebanese army prepares to enter the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp. Thousands of refugees evacuate the camp, taking advantage of the fragile ceasefire. Paris: We are not in agreement with Lebanese who level accusations against Syria" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/24)

"Former Lebanese PM al-Hoss criticizes accusation against Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/24)

"Amnesty International issues its human rights report: Bush has exploited fear of terrorism to violate human rights" (Government-owned A-Thawra, 5/24)

"Palestinian PM Hanieh and President Abbas discuss cool-down in Gaza. Israeli assaults kill seven Palestinian children" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/24)

"Washington flees its failure in Iraq by expanding the UN role" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/24)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"A Strong Syria Is our Choice"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/24): "Amid a troubled Middle East and growing world tension due to the policies of the US Administration, Syria stands out as a model of security, stability, coexistence, and tolerance among all groups of the Syrian people...."

"When Syrians stage marches of love and loyalty in every village, town, and city, they express this positive Syrian situation and announce their support for a political approach and a leader who understands the requirements of his people, who knows the dimensions of regional and international events, and who defends justice, dignity, sovereignty, and independence...."

"The referendum in a few days will be an opportunity for Syrians to announce that their choice is a strong and proud Syria. It is a referendum to preserve the climate of tolerance and brotherhood in a disturbed world. It is a referendum for work and building so that we can enter the future through its widest door and maintain a free, strong, and healthy homeland in which the coming generations will take pride...."

"For These Reasons Syria's Position
Is New and Distinguished"

Dr. Mahdi Dakhlallah, former Information Minister, commented in government-owned Tishreen (5/24): "Syria's steadfastness in the face of pressures and challenges in the past seven years has bordered on the miraculous.... Syria confronted sole-superpower hegemony without reliance on or support from anyone.... It adopted a defiant position although American and British forces were on its eastern border...."

"For the first time, almost the entire world, including Arab countries and establishments, participated in the siege on Syria in implementation of the Syria Accountability Act and in support of US policies in the region.... But despite all this, and despite the pressing Lebanese situation and retreat in Arab solidarity, Syria stood fast and escalated its steadfastness to defiance. What consolidated this steadfastness, perhaps, was the fact that Syria does not beg for wheat and bread from anyone, does not ask aid and loans from anyone, and is not burdened by a heavy foreign debt...."

"A difficult stage has passed, from which the brave Syrian people have emerged with head held high. These people now enter a new stage whose concerns will not be smaller, but their experience has become more mature."

"Creative Sedition"

Hanan Hamad, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/24):
"What is happening in Iraq cannot be separated from what is happening in Gaza and recently in Lebanon.... These events are part of attempts to create domestic sedition in light of the disappointing results of the American plan and the Israeli aggression on Lebanon....

"The Lebanese stage is being prepared to accomplish what the July aggression failed to accomplish....

"Dick Cheney's recent tour of a number of countries in the region, David Welch's visit to Lebanon, Terje Roed-Larsen's reappearance, and Javier Solana's brief visit to Lebanon are only details in the game-conspiracy that is being concocted, and which does not exclude anyone, contrary to what some parties imagine, especially the parties that found it easy to give up their countries' sovereignty and sink in the game up to their ears. These parties are now paving the way for the internationalization conspiracy, which began with the International Tribunal and which continues through voices demanding the deployment of forces on the border between brothers and kinfolk....

"Suspicious voices continue to level accusations against Syria, which offered what it offered for Lebanon's stability and unity.... The conspiracy is big, and the danger threatens everyone. Will

plotters return to reason and logic?"

"What Logic Are They Talking About?"

Omar Jaftali, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/24): "Although Israel is launching a genocidal war against Palestinians using F-16 planes and tanks in response to primitive Palestinian fire, some forces in the international community adopt the Israeli argument that Israel is acting in self-defense against terrorists who do not want peace....

"The Israeli aggression targets houses of peaceful people and indiscriminately kills children, women, and old people....

"The Olmert government officially announced that it does not rule out targeting Prime Minister Hanieh and other leaders, and a few months ago Israel detained members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Who, after all, is the terrorist?"

Corbin